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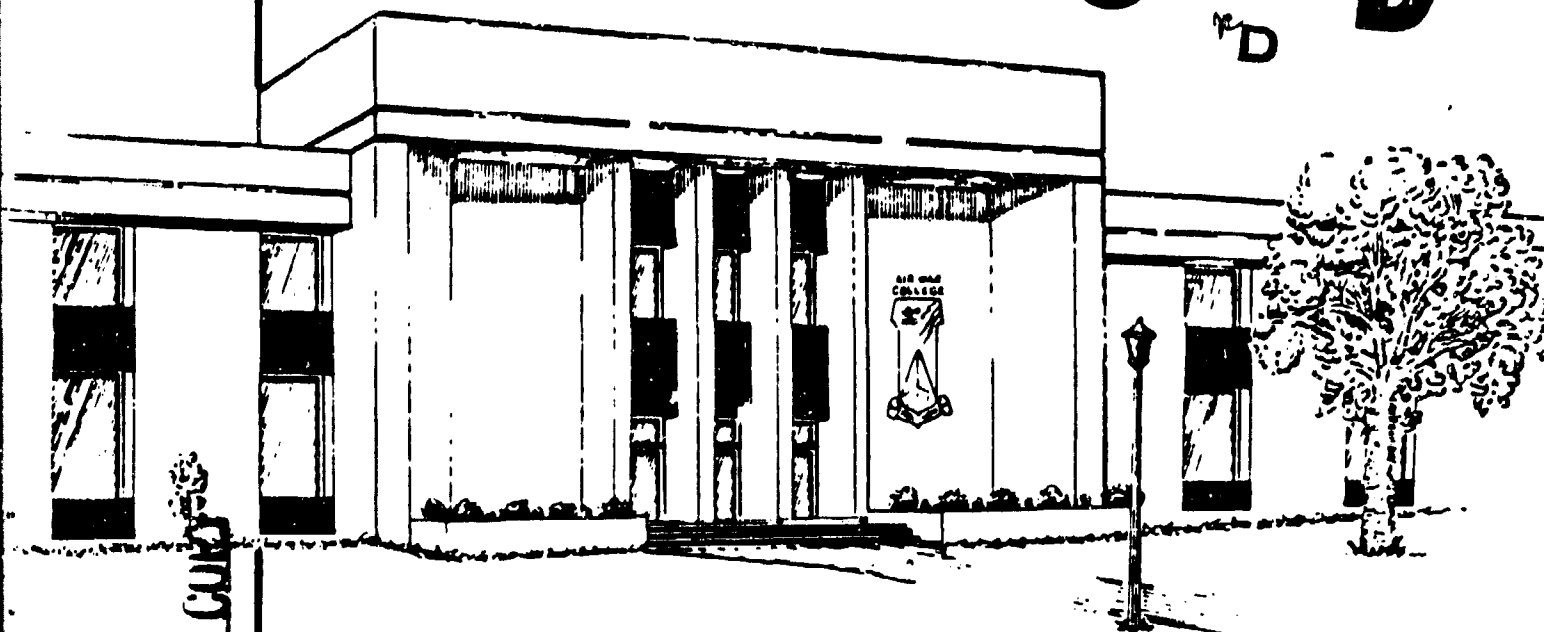
## RESEARCH REPORT

No. AU-AWC-86-188

THE NAVAL CAMPAIGN IN GALLIPOLI - 1915  
LESSONS LEARNED

By LT COL DOUGLAS J. SCOTT

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THE NAVAL CAMPAIGN IN GALLIPOLI - 1915  
LESSONS LEARNED

by

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A RESEARCH REPORT SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY  
IN  
FULFILLMENT OF THE RESEARCH  
REQUIREMENT

Research Advisor: Dr. Joseph L. Strange

MAXWELL AIR FORCE BASE, ALABAMA

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AIR WAR COLLEGE RESEARCH REPORT ABSTRACT

TITLE: The Naval Campaign in Gallipoli - 1915  
Lessons Learned

AUTHOR: Douglas J. Scott, Lieutenant Colonel, USAF

An analysis of the Allied naval campaign in Gallipoli in 1915, concentrating on the elements of perseverance and planning, derives lessons taught by the campaign and lessons learned by today's leaders from the campaign. It is suggested that perseverance lessons were well learned but planning lessons were not.

#### BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

In 1915, a window of opportunity existed for the Royal Navy to seize the Dardanelles solely by the use of sea power. This would open up the sea line of communication to Constantinople thus allowing Allied forces to attack the German homeland from Constantinople through the Balkan states. What caused the English to fail in the execution of this opportunity; an opportunity that could have had a decisive strategic consequence on the outcome of World War I? What turned the campaign from a potential brilliant success into a disaster of huge proportions? I will argue, as did the First Lord of the Admiralty, Winston Churchill, that the failure was due to human frailty, that lack of total commitment to see something through to the decisive end, that aversion to avoid suffering heavy despite calculated losses to achieve the final result. Churchill wrote in The World Crisis, 1915:

Not to persevere--that was the crime. 1  
Karl von Clausewitz, in his book On War, had this to say about perseverance:

In war more than anywhere else things do not turn out as we expect. Nearby they do not appear as they did from a distance. . . . a general in time of war is constantly bombarded by reports both true and false; by errors arising from fear or negligence or hastiness;

by disobedience born of right or wrong interpretations of ill will, of a proper or mistaken sense of duty, of laziness, or of exhaustion; and by accidents that nobody could have foreseen. In short, he is exposed to countless impressions, most of them disturbing, few of them encouraging. Long experience of war creates a knack of rapidly assessing these phenomena; courage and strength of character are as impervious to them as a rock to the rippling waves. If a man were to yield to these pressures, he would never complete an operation. Perseverance in the chosen course is the essential counterweight, provided that no compelling reasons intervene to the contrary. Moreover, there is hardly a worthwhile enterprise in war whose execution does not call for infinite effort, trouble, and privation; and as man under pressure tends to give in to physical and intellectual weakness, only great strength of will can lead to the objective. It is steadfastness that will earn the admiration of the world and of posterity. 2

Lack of perseverance toward the established objective caused this venture to be a failure rather than a success, and the military leader is as susceptible to that fault today as much as the military leader was in 1915. At Gallipoli, there were perseverance lessons taught at all levels of the spectrum, from grand strategy to battlefield management. The question is whether today's leaders, both military and political, have learned these lessons.



## CHAPTER II

### BACKGROUND

Approximately five months after the beginning of World War I, the Allied strategy of confronting the Germans in western Europe had bogged down. The armies were entrenched from the North Sea to the Swiss Alps and there was evidence that the Allies were taking casualties faster than the Germans. There were two schools of thought about where to go with the grand strategy in order to counter this stalemate on the western front. The "western" school felt that the battle should be fought in France and Germany, which was a direct approach to the German heartland involving the shortest lines of communications. The "eastern" school favored an indirect offensive somewhere in the Near East that would eliminate Turkey from the war and convince Italy and the Balkan states to join the war on the Allied side.

The debate was deadlocked until Russia requested assistance in the form of some kind of demonstration in the Near East against the Turks who were then engaged against the Russian Armies in the Caucasus. As the Russian Armies were on the brink of collapse, it was decided to honor this request. The War Council, which included among its members Lord Kitchener, the Secretary of State for War, and Winston

Churchill, the First Lord of the Admiralty, decided that the Dardanelles was the appropriate location for this demonstration. Eric W. Bush, in Gallipoli, described the decision:

The War Council, after heated discussions, the crucial one being on January 13th when Churchill pleaded vehemently for troops, but was overruled, plus a threat by Admiral Fisher to resign, reached its final decisions on January 28th. An attempt would be made by the Navy alone to force the Dardanelles, with Constantinople as the objective. Experience could only show the effect of naval guns against the defences, fixed and mobile. An attack would first be made by a few ships against the Outer Forts. Should this preliminary attack prove successful the operations would be continued and a powerful force be concentrated. If unsuccessful, attention could be diverted elsewhere and the operations broken off. A preliminary attack would do no harm and would only have the effect of a diversion.

The decision thus arrived at on 28th January 1915 marks the first great landmark in the history of the Gallipoli Campaign. In an effort to satisfy the urgent need of diplomacy, an Allied Fleet was to attempt, without the aid of a single soldier, an enterprise which in the earlier days of the War the Admiralty and War Office had regarded as a military task. The operations would be more difficult but still capable of accomplishment if the inevitable loss of ships could be accepted. 1

As part of this decision, Churchill had asked Vice-Admiral Carden, whose small squadron of warships lay off the Dardanelles, about the feasibility of such an operation. Carden replied favorably and subsequently was asked to forward detailed particulars on how he felt the operation should be conducted. Bush continues:

The plan of attack drawn up by Vice-Admiral Carden was based on several main phases. The first phase was to reduce the defences at the entrance to the Straits. The next was to sweep the minefields and reduce the

defences up to the Narrows. A reduction of the forts in the Narrows would then follow, and the principle minefield, which was off Kephez Point, would be swept. Finally, after silencing the forts above the Narrows, the fleet would advance into the Sea of Marmara. The whole programme was expected to take one month." 2

Winston Churchill wrote in The World Crisis, 1915 that two advantageous factors existed to the benefit of the Allies:

. . . first, the existence of naval guns which far outranged the guns in the forts, and which were at the same time of immeasurably increased destructive power; secondly, the existence of a large class of heavily armed and heavily armoured ships which must pass out of commission in the course of a few months. 3

The crews of this fleet of ships would soon be needed to man new ships coming into the fleet as a result of the outbreak of war rendering the current fleet obsolete but only because of lack of personnel. Their guns were still more than what was required to knock out the forts adjacent to the Dardanelles. 4 So the plan was very neat and tidy; a systematic advance with the large ships providing protective cover for the smaller minesweepers with all operations conducted outside the maximum range of the large calibre weapons of the Turks. The result of positive execution of this battle plan would have been a decisive victory that linked the Russian front with the Western front, turning them into mere holding actions. Constantinople and the Ottoman Empire would fall, followed quickly by Bulgaria, opening the way for an attack on Austria-Hungary through the Balkan states. It was thought that this plan could be completed quickly enough to avoid the costly trench warfare.

## CHAPTER III

### EXECUTION OF THE PLAN

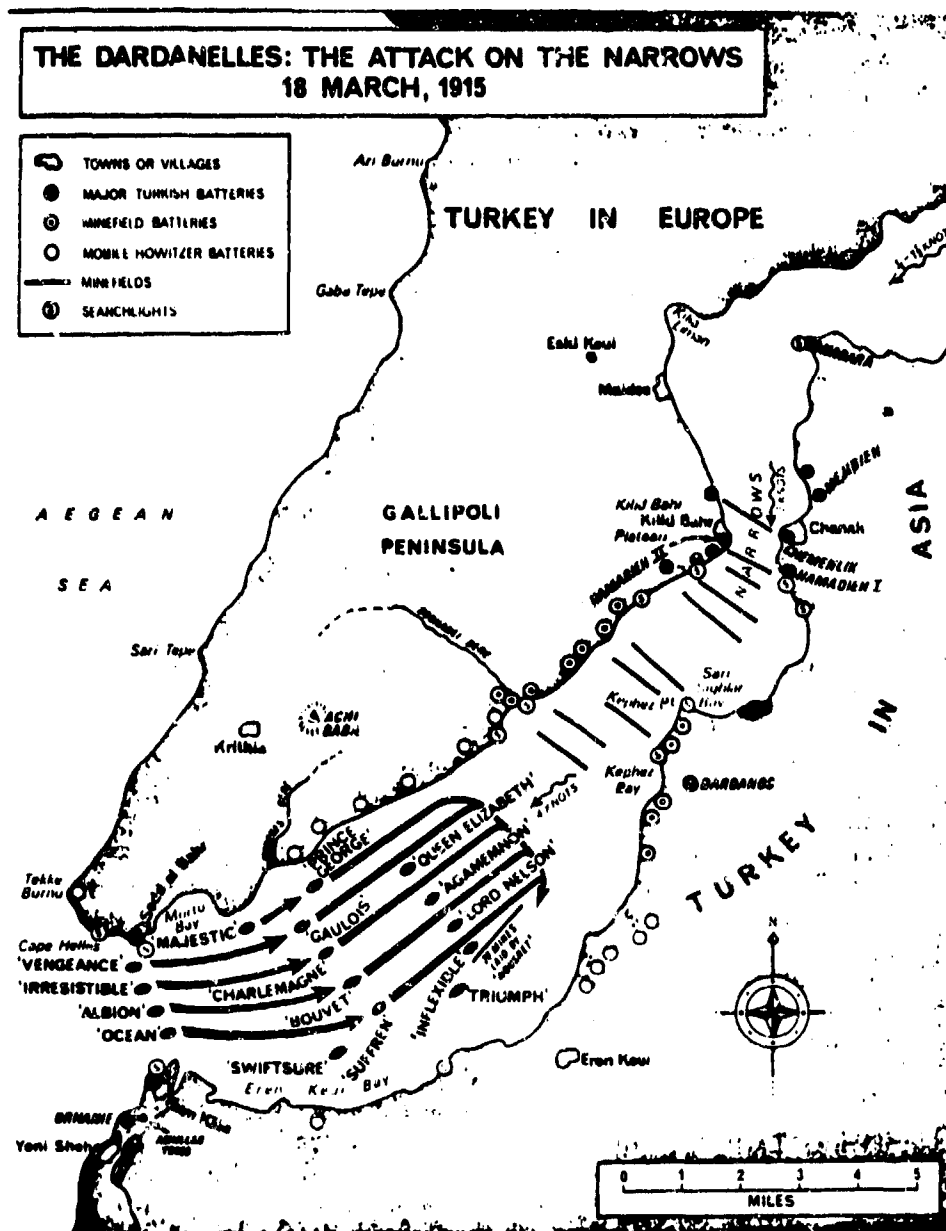
The outer forts were destroyed during the month of February, taking longer than expected due to poor weather. Minesweeping to the Narrows followed, and by the 17th all was ready for the main attack up the channel. On the morning of 18 March, the main attack began, described by Robert James in his book, Gallipoli, as follows:

On March 18th, having given Churchill an assurance that he wholeheartedly supported the enterprise and Carden's plans, de Robeck ordered the Allied fleet to advance to the attack on the Dardanelles.

No less than 18 battleships, surrounded by an armada of cruisers and destroyers, swept majestically across the glittering waters of the Straits. It was an unforgettable picture of aloof grandeur, and made an immense impression on all who saw it; 'It looked as if no human power could withstand such an array of might and power,' one officer subsequently related. 1

There were three lines of four ships abreast moving up the channel into firing position. (See map on page 7) Up until this point, there had been little observed activity on the part of any Turkish naval vessels. However, seven days earlier, under cover of rain and darkness, the Turkish steamer **Nousret** was able to lay a line of twenty mines parallel to but offset to the right of the center of the channel. These mines were laid after the Allied minesweepers had cleared this area in preparation for the ships which were to steam up this channel as they shelled

the forts on either shore. (More on this subject later.)



As each line of ships completed their shelling they executed right turn to head back down the channel allowing the next line of ships to move forward into position for firing. During the course of this maneuvering, three ships, the **Bouvet**, **Irresistible**, and **Inflexible**, struck mines and were sunk with a heavy loss of life. Eric Bush writes:

The great attempt to force the Narrows with the Fleet had ended on its first day in what could only be regarded as a defeat. Of the sixteen battleships engaged three had been sunk and three more, including the only battle-cruiser, had been put out of action for a long time. The main cause of the trouble was, of course, the line of fresh mines laid by the **Nousret**. It was impossible at this stage properly to assess the damage done to the forts.

On March 20th Admiral de Robeck telegraphed to the Admiralty: 'Plan for re-organising minesweeping progressing. . . . It is hoped to be in a position to commence operations in three or four days.'

The Admiralty had regarded his report only as the result of the first day's fighting. Until it was known what damage had been done to the forts it was impossible to say that another attempt would be decisive. Political reasons for carrying on were of course very strong. Our losses would be made good.

But the fates now stepped in. On March 19th, the day following the great battle, the weather broke. Day after day it blew strong northeasterly gales, with a visibility so low that firing was out of the question. No offensive action was possible until the storms abated. 3

However, before the storms abated there were numerous discussions between Admiral de Robeck and General Sir Ian Hamilton, who had been placed in command of the ground forces being sent to support the Navy, as well as several telegrams between Admiral de Robeck and the Admiralty in London. Out of these emerged the decision to cancel the original plan of the naval only campaign, and

replace it with a plan to wait for the ground forces and then proceed with a combined operation. The result is history. The ensuing delay to coordinate the combined campaign allowed the Turks to rearm and caused the combined campaign to be a disaster. The Australian and New Zealand forces suffered extremely heavy losses without even coming close to achieving their objective. The irony of the situation was the fact the the naval campaign was so close to being successful. How close is described by Admiral Sir Roger Keyes in The Fight for Gallipoli:

According to the German Official Account, written by Muhlman, a staff officer of Liman von Sanders, in 'Der Kampf um die Dardanellen, 1915,' page 74: 'Most of the Turkish ammunition had been expended. The medium howitzers and minefield batteries had fired half of their supply . . . for the five 35.5 cm. guns there were only 271 rounds, say 50 each; for the eleven 23 cm. between 30 and 50 rounds per gun . . . Particularly serious was the fact that the long range H.E. shells, which alone were effective against armour, were nearly used up. Fort Hamidieh had only 17 of them, Kilid Bahr but 10. Also there was no reserve of mines. What, then, was to happen if the battle was renewed on the 19th and following days with undiminished violence?' 4

## CHAPTER IV

### ANALYSIS OF HUMAN FRAILTY

Now let us see how some of Clausewitz's "errors arising from fear or negligence or hastiness, or reports both true and false" impacted on the leaders who made the decisions in this infamous campaign. There are a number of these situations which relate directly to Churchill's opinion of lack of perseverance. For clarity's sake let's analyze them according to the major persons involved in the decision making process. They would be the following: Secretary of State for War Lord Kitchener, First Lord of the Admiralty Winston Churchill, and the commander of the naval force at the scene Admiral de Robeck.

First, Lord Kitchener was unable to find ground troops, however few in number, to make a demonstration as requested by the Russians. Winston Churchill described the situation like this:

Later in the day Lord Kitchener came over himself to see me at the Admiralty, and we had a full discussion on the Russian telegram and whether the Navy could do anything to help. All the possible alternatives in the Turkish theatre were mentioned. We both had in mind our discussions of November on the possibilities of a descent from Egypt upon Gallipoli. We both saw clearly the far-reaching consequences of a successful attack upon Constantinople. If there was any prospect of a serious attempt to force the Straits of the Dardanelles at a later stage, it would be in the highest degree improvident to stir them up for the sake of a mere demonstration. I put this point forward, and



suggested alternative diversions to help the Russians. Lord Kitchener did not dissent from the argument, but he returned steadily and decidedly to the statement that he had no troops to spare, and could not face a large new expansion of our military commitments. 1

This was Kitchener's position on January 2, 1915, and yet on March 12, 1915 he announced his decision to send Sir Ian Hamilton and four divisions of ground forces to assist in the Dardanelles campaign. These forces did, in fact, arrive at the Dardanelles and landed on the Peninsula on April 25, 1915, less than 40 days after Admiral de Robeck initiated his ill-fated attempt at the Straits. If Lord Kitchener had made this decision earlier and designed the campaign as a combined effort from the start, it might have been successful. The key would have been to secret the four divisions to the beachhead; a task much more formidable today than in 1915. The British and French armada assembled for the Dardanelles operation was one of the largest the world had witnessed to that date, and yet there is no evidence to suggest that the Turks expected the attack. I leave it to the reader to decide on the probable outcome if the operation had gone in this fashion.

Now what of Churchill's position after the events of March 18th and his endeavor to persuade the War Council to insist that de Robeck re-attack at the earliest opportunity. Admiral de Robeck's opinion after meeting with General Hamilton on March 23rd was that certain modifications to the

naval attack needed to be carefully thought out prior to the re-attack. As these modifications would not be completed until the time the ground forces were prepared to land, he proposed a joint operation for the re-attack. Churchill's initial proposed reply contained these words:

. . . we consider that you ought to persevere methodically but resolutely with the plan . . . We do not think the time has yet come to give up the plan of forcing Dardanelles by a purely naval operation. 2

Churchill feared the inevitable delays associated with assembly and movement of ground troops as well as the increased troop strength on the Turk side that would obviously be accomplished during this delay. However, the Admirals in the War Council overruled his opinion and he was forced to send out a modified telegram of instructions which left the decision in the hands of the field commander. In this instance, this decision was a poor one as later intelligence and information from the Turks forces themselves lead to the conclusion that the naval reattack would have easily succeeded. We have seen this situation over and over again since Gallipoli. The question remains unsettled; who is in the best position to call the shot, the field commander or the higher headquarters?

And now to the final main character, Admiral John de Robeck. Until the week before the assault on the Straits, de Robeck had been in command of a battleship and Admiral Carden was the officer in charge of the entire naval

campaign. However,

"At this critical moment, and before Hamilton arrived on the scene, Carden had collapsed from the accumulation of strain and worry, and the conduct of the imminent operations developed upon Vice-Admiral de Robeck, who had been Carden's second-in-command. 3

So here is a brand new overall commander who suddenly has the weight of the whole operation placed on his shoulders by virtue of the collapse of his superior officer. The next event to overcome him was the disastrous first day of the assault on the Straits.

De Robeck meanwhile, was brooding over the events of March 18th. . . . he spoke mournfully of 'disaster', and could not be lifted out of his gloom. Not only had he lost one-third of his force, but he had no idea what had caused the catastrophe. He did not know, nor was it known until after the war, that the battleships had blundered into a row of mines laid in Eren Keui Bay only a few nights before. 4

These were the mines laid by the Mousret mentioned earlier. It appears from all accounts, including those of Hamilton and Keyes, the naval Chief-of-Staff, that de Robeck at this point decided to abandon the Carden plan and make the operation a joint one with Hamilton's ground troops. This decision doomed the entire Gallipoli campaign, both naval and military, to failure. The result of this decision was a dual command situation where neither commander fully understood the other's objectives and intentions leading to the embarrassing defeat of the Allied forces by the Turks and Germans, the very embarrassment that Kitchener and Churchill wanted so much to avoid.

## CHAPTER V

### LESSONS TAUGHT

There are a number of lessons taught to the military professional by the study of this campaign, not the least of which is perseverance as alluded to in the opening paragraphs. Perseverance is a most abstract and difficult lesson to grasp because it is so pervaded by what-if's. What if the Mousret had not laid the twenty mines? What if Churchill had persuaded the War Council to transmit his first telegram of instructions to de Robeck? What if the weather had not turned sour on the night of the 18th, not giving de Robeck time to brood over his losses? What if Carden had remained stable and led the attack? No one will ever know the definite answers to these questions. However, there is substantial evidence indicating that the situation was ripe for an Allied victory in this unique episode; a victory that would have had decisive strategic consequences on the outcome of the war. Circumstances caused the leaders to lose their resolve to see the naval campaign through to completion; circumstances lead to the lack of perseverance. Many of the circumstances are contained in the what-if questions. The leaders generally had some degree of control over these circumstances except that of the weather, which proved to be the decisive delay. It gave the leaders on the

scene time to think and brood over the previous events, all of which appeared to be bad; and all of which, no doubt, influenced the decision to change.

How strong was the commitment to persevere?

Churchill certainly had a commitment as demonstrated in his first proposal of the message to be sent to deRobeck after the events of the 18th of March. His message was to read in part:

. . . we consider that you ought to persevere methodically but resolutely with the plan contained in your instructions and in Admiralty telegram 109, and that you should make all preparations to renew the attack begun on 18th at the first favourable opportunity. 1

However, Churchill was unable to obtain the War Council's approval of this message. He wrote subsequently that he was:

. . . compelled under extreme duress to abandon the intention of sending direct orders to Admiral de Robeck to renew the attack. I had to content myself with sending a reasoned telegram which, while giving him the strongest possible lead, left the decision still in the Admiral's hands. 2

The Admiral did not persevere and the opportunity was lost. Churchill's comment about the crime being the lack of perseverance could have been meant as a self-criticism as well as a criticism of de Robeck and others.

But perseverance is not the only lesson taught at the Dardanelles. There are important lessons in planning contained in this chapter of history. Planning lessons are found at the conception of the idea to force the

Dardanelles. If the War Council had thought out the plan in greater detail, they perhaps would not have gone with the naval only approach, but would have attacked the Dardanelles with a combined force from the very beginning. The real lesson with regard to planning, however, is not found in analyzing the existing plans but is found in the lack of them. There was a distinct lack of planning for a ground force to occupy Constantinople in the event the naval campaign was successful. There were no instructions on what to do if the fleet did get through to Constantinople. The reason for this was perhaps because the idea was conceived so quickly and placed into effect so rapidly that time was not available to look that far into the future. It's as if the War Council were at their wits end and were trying anything which showed the least bit of probability for success; trying things with very short range planning until they came across something which succeeded and then they would develop the long range plan. Sir Ian Hamilton's description of the planning process is perhaps typical:

. . . On the German system plans for a landing on Gallipoli would have been in my pocket, up-to-date and worked out to a ball cartridge and a pail of water. By the British system(?) I have been obliged to concoct my own plans in a brace of shakes almost under fire. Strategically and tactically our method may have its merits, for though it piles everything on to one man, the Commander, yet he is the chap who has got to see it through. 3

The British faired well in later years in this planning issue as evidenced by the World War II counter-offensive of

the British 8th Army at El Alamein in North Africa. The British commander, General Bernard Montgomery, had elaborate intelligence data available concerning the German posture, and he formulated a detailed plan for the attack. Montgomery decisively defeated Rommel's forces, and the Axis Powers lost Cyrenaica.

## CHAPTER VI

### LESSONS LEARNED

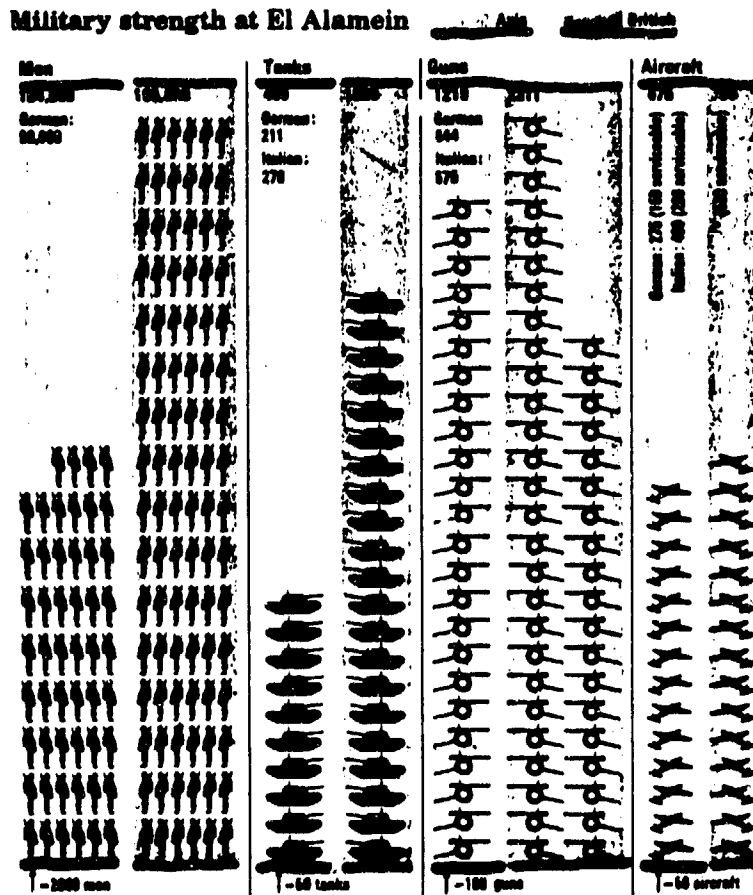
How well have our political and military leaders learned the lessons taught by the study of Gallipoli? History indicates that we have learned the perseverance lesson fairly well and the planning lesson not well enough.

On one hand, our leaders have done well this century with regard to what Churchill described as the lack of perseverance. Our political and military leaders fared well in this regard during the two World Wars and the Korean conflict. In these engagements, we held a steady course and were not sidetracked by the elements Clausewitz discussed, namely "reports both true and false" or "errors arising from fear or negligence or hastiness". In the Pacific, we have survived the serious differences between Truman and MacArthur, and persevered in maintaining the cease fire or armistice in Korea. In Europe, we have persevered in the maintenance of the North Atlantic Treaty and obtained the longest peaceful period in the area since the turn of the century.

It is interesting to note the contrast in the level of perseverance shown by the British at Gallipoli with the level shown by them at the battle of El Alamein in World War II. General Montgomery was pressured by Churchill to



initiate the counter-offensive at El Alamein just as de Robeck was pressured years earlier. Montgomery, however, was determined to have superior forces assured before the attack (see diagram below).



1

Liddell Hart, in History of the Second World War, states:

But the disparity of strength between the two sides was so large that even a very disparity ratio of attrition was bound to work in favour of Montgomery's purpose - pressed with the unflinching determination that was characteristic of him in all he undertook. 2

On the other hand, we have not faired so well in the planning process; the best example of which is the Vietnam conflict. Vietnam is to the United States what Gallipoli was to the British Empire. Poor long range planning or lack of a long range goal without a specific means to achieve the end cost the English over 28,000 killed and over 78,000 wounded at Gallipoli. Failure to learn this lesson cost the United States over 47,000 killed and over 150,000 wounded in Vietnam. The United States entered the conflict in Southeast Asia without a clear objective or a means to achieve it. Neither the means or the end were ever clear and unchanging. Bombing tactics, for example, constantly changed in an attempt to alter the seemingly constant behavior pattern of the North Vietnamese.

The British, however, appear to have learned the lesson well, again as evidenced at El Alamein. They had the advantage of superior intelligence data provided by their access to ULTRA, the German communications system, as well as excellent battlefield intelligence provided by the Royal Air Force. Montgomery formulated a detailed plan based upon the ULTRA information and then made major modifications to it based on Royal Air Force intelligence gathered during the battle itself.

There is, however, a danger in learning this lesson too well. Where is the dividing line between perseverance

and folly? When does perseverance become folly? Did de Robeck have the intelligence data on the Turks as Montgomery had on the Germans? History shows that the data was available to the War Council but it is unclear how much of it was available to de Robeck. Sir Ian Hamilton's perseverance in the follow-on military campaign to capture the Gallipoli Peninsula may very well have been folly. What can be done in advance of an operation to help the commander to judge when perseverance is positive and can lead to victory or when perseverance is negative and can lead to defeat. Good intelligence supporting a detailed plan may be the best answer.

In 1932, Edmond Delage wrote in The Tragedy of the Dardanelles:

Among all the errors of the War this campaign was the most grievous. It was a triumph of wasted heroism and loyalty. The naval attack of the 18th of March . . . will live for ever in the history of human courage.

. . . sailors who fought under . . . de Robeck, soldiers of France and of all the counties of old England, you! all of you, what heroes! But-to what end did you die? 3

Will we ever learn the lesson well enough that the historians can stop asking that haunting question?

## APPENDIX

### CHRONOLOGICAL LIST OF EVENTS - 1915

28 January	War Council decides on Gallipoli as the place for the demonstration in response to the Russian request.
February	Outer forts bombarded.
8 March	Nousret lays an additional line of 20 mines.
12 March	Kitchener announces plan to send a military force to the Dardanelles.
18 March	Admiral de Robeck commences attack on the Straits.
20 March	de Robeck telegraphs Admiralty with reattack plans.
23 March	de Robeck decides, after meeting with Hamilton, to proceed with a combined campaign.
25 April	Military force lands.

## NOTES

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2. Carl von Clausewitz, On War, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1976), p. 193. (Emphasis added)

### CHAPTER II (Pages 3-5)

1. Eric Wheler Bush, Gallipoli, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1975), p. 34. (Emphasis added)
2. Ibid., p. 37. (This series of messages between Churchill and Carden is remarkably similiar to the present United States crisis action system of warning orders, commander's estimates, alert orders, operations plans, and execute orders. The messages of 1915 were certainly considerably less structured than todays formats.)
3. Winston S. Churchill, The World Crisis, 1915, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1923), PP. 96-97.
4. Ibid., pp. 96-102. (These pages contain a detailed analysis of firepower of the opposing forces.)

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2. Eric Wheler Bush, Gallipoli, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1975), p. 53.
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2. Ibid., p. 238.

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4. Ibid., p. 65.

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2. Ibid., p. 239.

3. Sir Ian Hamilton, Gallipoli Diary, (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1920), pp. 42-43.

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3. Edmond Delage, The Tragedy of the Dardanelles, (London: John Lane the Bodley Head Ltd., 1932) p. 256.

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